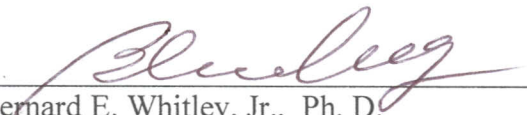


Racial Attitudes of College Students from Urban and Rural Backgrounds


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## Abstract

Based on the contact hypothesis, I hypothesized that college students from rural backgrounds, who are less likely to have had contact with members of minority groups, will be more likely to hold stereotypic beliefs about and may hold more negative attitudes toward those groups than students from urban areas, who have had more opportunities for intergroup contact. Students from Ball State University completed a questionnaire assessing depth of contact with African-Americans, negative and positive stereotypes of African-Americans, affective prejudice toward African-Americans, symbolic racism, and perceived threat and perceived competitiveness toward African-Americans. Contrary to the hypothesis, there were no differences between students from urban and rural backgrounds on the indicators of prejudice. However, students from rural backgrounds did report having less contact with African-Americans and intergroup contact was negatively related to prejudice. These results suggest that personal experiences may be better indicators of prejudice than demographic background.

### Racial Attitudes of College Students from Urban and Rural Backgrounds

Ever since the contact hypothesis was formulated by Gordon Allport (1954), it has been a guiding principle in psychologists' approaches to improving intergroup relations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2005). The hypothesis proposes that positive intergroup contact can reduce prejudice by undermining stereotypes. Conversely, it implies that people who have little contact with members of other groups will be more likely to hold stereotypic beliefs about and in some instances hold negative attitudes toward those groups.

One factor that can inhibit intergroup contact in the United States is residential segregation by race. Although racial segregation is banned by law, it still exists in practice. For example, African Americans are 30% to 40% more likely to live in segregated neighborhoods than Hispanics or Native Americans (Lichter, Parisi, Grice, & Taquino, 2007). One factor influencing residential segregation in the Northern United States is residential locale: urban areas are much more likely to have racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse populations than rural areas, thus creating more opportunities for intergroup contact (Tuch, 1987). Given fewer opportunities for contact, it is possible that residents of rural areas hold more stereotypic beliefs about members of minority groups and have less favorable intergroup attitudes than residents of urban areas.

The hypothesis that urban residents hold more positive intergroup attitudes than residents of rural areas is not new. Stouffer (1955) expressed this view in the mid-1950s and Wirth (1964a,b) repeated it a decade later. However, the theory remained untested until Tuch's (1987) research. He proposed that because urban areas include a large mass of people with different backgrounds and characteristics, the urban environment leads to multiple interactions between

people who hold divergent attitudes, values, and beliefs. This situation produces more tolerant feelings toward groups that are different from one's own. In contrast, non-urban residents typically share the same background and characteristics and rarely come into contact with others of different values, beliefs, and life-styles. Thus, Tuch (1987) postulated that non-urban residents may not develop tolerance for individuals from backgrounds that differ greatly from their own. When Tuch (1987) tested his hypothesis using data from a national survey, he found that European Americans who moved to urban areas from non-urban regions over a four year period experienced a growth in racial tolerance; in contrast, European Americans who migrated to non-urban regions from urban areas experienced a decrease in tolerance over a four year period. Tuch interpreted these findings as indicating that migrants had been socialized into local norms

More recently, Carter, Steelman, Malkey, and Borch (2005) conducted a comprehensive study of the urban-rural hypothesis by examining responses to 11 national surveys conducted from 1972 to 1996. They found that urban residents constantly scored higher than rural residents on two indices of racial tolerance. Even when other possible predictors of racial prejudice—such as gender, age, education, socioeconomic status, and geographic region (Northern versus Southern states)—were controlled the urban-rural difference remained.

Although both Tuch (1987) and Carter et al. (2005) believed that their findings could be explained by the urban environment's providing more opportunities for intergroup contact than the rural environment, the survey data they used in their studies did not permit a direct test of the contact hypothesis. The goal of the current study is to directly test that hypothesis. Researchers have found contact and favorable intergroup views to be positively correlated across time and across differences in the group that is the target of prejudice, age of the research participants,

geographic area of research, and research setting (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The hypothesis to be tested is that college students from urban backgrounds hold more tolerant intergroup attitudes than those from rural backgrounds and that this difference is mediated by differences in intergroup contact.

### *Methodological Issues*

The measure of intergroup contact was self-reports from participants. Meaningful, or deep, contact is needed for meaningful change in intergroup attitudes; superficial or brief contact will have little or no effect (McGuigan & Scholl, 2007). Therefore, the main indicator of contact for this research was depth of contact.

Because intergroup attitudes are complex constructs, the current study assessed it in several ways. The focus of this study will be racial attitudes. Because of the large body of evidence supporting its validity, Henry and Sears' (2002; Sears & Henry, 2005) Symbolic Racism 2000 scale was the primary measure used to assess these attitudes. Furthermore, because people can simultaneously hold positive and negative beliefs about a group (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Katz & Hass, 1988) the study assessed the positive and negative stereotypes participants hold toward African Americans (Czopp & Monteith, 2006). Also, because intergroup emotions predict intergroup behavior better than stereotypes (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), participants' emotional reactions toward African-Americans were assessed. Finally, Duckitt (2006) has proposed that perceived threat and competition from outgroups are important components of prejudice. Therefore, perceived threat and perceived competition posed by African Americans were also measured.

### *Hypothesis*

Using the contact hypothesis as its guide, the current study investigated the relative levels of prejudice toward African Americans among European Americans from urban and rural backgrounds. The primary hypothesis is that European Americans from urban backgrounds will exhibit less prejudice than those from non-urban backgrounds and that intergroup contact will mediate this difference in attitudes.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

The original participant pool consisted of 147 male and 208 female introductory psychology students who took part in the study in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. Because the research focused on the racial attitudes of White Americans and to control for regional differences, only the data from participants who reported being White and having been raised in the Midwestern United States were used. The final sample consisted of 112 men and 146 women who ranged in age from 18 to 39 with a mean age of 19.20 years.

#### *Procedure*

Participants completed a questionnaire consisting of the items and scales listed below. The questionnaire was administered using an on-line survey program developed by the university where the research was being conducted.

#### *Participant Demographic Characteristics*

Participants reported their age, race, and whether they were raised in the United States. Participants who were raised in the U.S were asked to report the city or town in which they spent the most years growing up and the state in which their hometown was located. Participants' hometowns were classified as urban or rural using their population sizes. Hometowns were

grouped into five size categories based on the system used by the Indiana Business Research Center (Justis, 2007): group one were cities with more than 75,000, group two were cities between 75,000 and 50,000, group three were small cities between 50,000 and 25,000, group four were towns between 25,000 and 10,000, and group five were small towns with less than 10,000 people.

### *Intergroup Contact*

Intergroup contact was measured using McGuigan and Scholl's (2007) scale that assesses depth of intergroup contact. Sample items are "*I have made close friends with African-American people*" and "*I have had an African-American person work for me.*" Participants responded using a 5-point scale ranging from 1= *never* to 5= *repeatedly (7 or more times)*.

### *Intergroup Attitudes*

Intergroup attitudes were assessed using five scales: symbolic racism, affective prejudice, positive/negative stereotypes, and perceived threat and competition. The symbolic racism scale (Henry & Sears, 2002) consists of 8 items including "*Over the past few years, blacks have gotten less than they deserve*" and "*Some say that black leaders have been trying to push too fast. Others feel that they haven't pushed fast enough. What do you think?*" Participants responded on 5-point scales, the content of which varied as a function of item stem (see Henry & Sears, 2002). The affective prejudice scale (Whitley, 1999) assessed participant's emotional reactions toward African Americans using items such as "*Generally speaking, I dislike Black people.*" The scale included seven positive and seven negative affects which respondents rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 5= *strongly agree* to 1= *strongly disagree* (a higher score meant more prejudice toward African Americans). Negative and positive stereotypes of African

Americans were assessed using Czopp and Monteith's (2006) Multidimensional Racial Attitudes (CSNP) scale. Items include "*There are so many Black criminals because Black people are naturally more aggressive*" and "*Most Black people have a sense of coolness that White people don't have.*" The perceived competitiveness scale (Duckitt, 2006) assessed the extent to which participants see other groups to be in competition with their ingroup. A sample item is "*If African Americans make economic gains, people like me will be worse off*" The perceived threat scale (Duckitt, 2006) assessed participants' perceptions of the extent to which an outgroup threatens their ingroup. A sample item is "*African-Americans seem to reject moral values that are important to me.*" Participants respond to both using 5-point scales ranging from 5=*strongly agree* to 1=*strongly disagree*.

## Results

The data were analyzed using a 5 (size of hometown) x 2 (sex of participants) analysis of variance (ANOVA). The dependent variables were symbolic racism, affective prejudice, negative stereotypes, positive stereotypes, perceived threat, perceived competition, and intergroup contact. Table 1 shows the mean scores on the dependent variables by size of hometown and their associated *F*-values. Contrary to the hypothesis, there were no differences in prejudice scores as a function of hometown size. However, as shown in the last row of Table 1, participants who had grown up in more urban areas were significantly more likely to have had contact with African Americans than participants from rural areas.

Table 2 shows the means scores on the dependent variables by sex of participant and the *F*-values for the sex of participant main effect and the sex by hometown size interaction. Similar to the results for population size, there was only one significant gender difference on racial



attitudes: For affective prejudice, men were more likely than women to report negative feelings toward African-Americans.

In contrast, when the same variables were explored using a correlational analysis there were a number of significant findings, as shown in Table 3. Most importantly, self-reports of contact were correlated with all measures of prejudice except perceived threat. Participants who reported less contact with African Americans were more likely to report higher levels of symbolic prejudice, affective prejudice, perceived competition, and endorsement of both positive and negative stereotypes. The only non-significant correlation was for with perceived threat.

### Discussion

The current research was based on the hypothesis that because college students who grew up in small towns were less likely to have had contact with African Americans than students who grew up in urban areas, they would express more prejudiced attitudes toward African Americans. As expected, students from smaller communities reported less contact with African Americans than those from large communities; however, community size was not associated with prejudice.

These findings stand in contrast to those of Tuch (1987) and Carter et al. (2005), who found urban residents to be less prejudiced than residents of rural areas. Why might these differences have occurred? One possible reason lies in the characteristics of the populations from which the samples were drawn. Carter et al. (2005) used data from the archives of the National Opinion Research Center and Tuch (1987) used data from the General Social Survey. Adult respondents predominate in both survey data sets, whereas the current research used a college student sample. College students tend to have more liberal attitudes than the general population (Hello, Scheepers, Vermulst, & Gerris, 2004) and higher education is also associated with lower

prejudice (Hello et al., 2004) Thus, the characteristics of people who attend college or the college experience itself may have overridden any effect of growing up in a community of a given size. Future research on the urban-rural difference hypothesis should use individuals who currently live in rural and urban areas as participants rather than college students.

A second difference between the participants in the present study and Tuch's (1987) and Carter et al.'s (2005) studies is age. The participants in the latter studies were typically older than the participants in the current study. Thus, the difference in findings may have resulted from a generational effect. Younger people generally express less prejudice than older people (Firebaugh, & Davis, 1988), so older people who live in small towns may express less tolerance of African Americans while their younger counterparts are less prejudiced.

A final possible reason why the results of the current study were not consistent with those of past research is the operational definition of urban versus rural areas. In the current study, hometowns of participants were classified as urban or rural on the basis of population. It is common in Midwestern states, such as Indiana, to have small towns near big cities. Individuals who live in those towns will often travel to bigger cities for work, shopping, athletic and cultural events, and other recreational activities, thus creating more opportunities for intergroup contact. Therefore, using population size of hometowns may not be the best way to differentiate between urban and rural areas. Future studies should use a different categorical approach that incorporates a wider domain for urban areas.

Although the results of the current study did not support the urban-rural difference hypothesis, consistent with Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, they did indicate that more contact with African Americans was associated with less prejudice toward them. Consequently,

it would appear that personal experiences are more closely associated with prejudice than hometown size. However, because this finding was correlational, one should not draw a causal conclusion from it; it is possible that prejudiced attitudes cause individuals to have less contact with African Americans rather than contact reducing prejudice. In addition, the results suggest that an indirect relationship may exist between hometown size and racial attitudes: hometown size predicted the amount of contact with African Americans, which in turn predicted less prejudiced attitudes. Future research should examine the possibility of such indirect effects more rigorously.

In conclusion, intergroup contact can reduce prejudice feelings toward minority groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). To relieve these damaging attitudes, organizations and institutions that favor racial equality should create situations that promote positive intergroup contact. These events could include activities, such as after school clubs, and concerts with bands that feature a variety of ethnic groups. Universities can make it a requirement for students to volunteer in a social setting unfamiliar to their own. However, for meaningful intergroup contact to occur it is up to the individual to be open and positive toward members of other groups. Traveling outside one's comfort zone may be difficult at first, but it will prove to be positive for society as a whole in the end.

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Table 1

*Mean Prejudice and Contact Scores by Size of Hometown*

	Population of Hometown					<i>F</i> (4, 246)
	More than 75,000	75,000 to 50,000	50,000 to 25,000	25,000 to 10,000	Less than 10,000	
Symbolic Racism	3.02	2.93	3.03	3.03	3.05	0.25
Affective Prejudice	2.05	2.33	2.22	2.33	2.22	1.28
Negative Stereotyp	2.44	2.75	2.69	2.69	2.63	1.41
Positive Stereotypes	2.90	2.91	3.00	3.01	2.97	0.40
Perceived Threat	2.50	2.82	2.47	2.53	2.60	1.88
Perceived Competition	2.53	2.66	2.54	2.60	2.65	0.35
Intergroup Contact	3.19 <sub>a</sub>	3.08 <sub>ab</sub>	2.78 <sub>bc</sub>	2.62 <sub>c</sub>	2.54 <sub>c</sub>	7.34**

\*\* $p < .01$

*Note:* Scores represent means ranging from 1 to 5. Means with different subscripts are significantly different using Tukey's HSD at .05 level of significance

Table 2

*Mean Prejudice and Contact Scores by Sex of Participant*

			Sex of Participant	Population Size x Sex Interaction
	Men	Women	<i>F</i> (1,246)	<i>F</i> (4,246)
Symbolic Racism	3.02	3.01	0.03	1.54
Affective Prejudice	2.34	2.12	5.68*	0.37
Negative Stereotypes	2.65	2.63	0.07	1.07
Positive Stereotypes	2.91	3.01	2.22	1.03
Perceived Threat	2.56	2.61	0.38	0.54
Perceived Competition	2.61	2.58	0.09	1.53
Intergroup Contact	2.80	2.85	0.28	1.27

\* $p < .05$ 

Note: Scores represent means ranging from 1 to 5



Table 3

*Correlations Among the Variables*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Symbolic Racism (1)	1	.49**	.66**	.00	.40**	.67**	-.18**
Affective Prejudice (2)		1	.689**	.01	.49**	.53**	-.37**
Negative Stereotypes (3)			1	.24**	.53**	.69**	-.33**
Positive Stereotypes (4)				1	.04	.05	-.12*
Perceived Threat (5)					1	.38**	-.11
Perceived Competition (6)						1	-.19**
Intergroup Contact (7)							1

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$